

Video-Music: New Correlations

**Whitney Museum of American Art, Downtown Branch
at Federal Hall National Memorial, 26 Wall Street (at Broad)
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Music Word Fire and I Would Do It Again (Coo-Coo): "The Lessons" From Perfect Lives (Private Parts) (1981) by Robert Ashley. Photo by Mary Lucier.

Music suggests images, whether in the content of its lyrics or in the reveries induced at the height of a crescendo. Likewise, images often suggest music, whether in the harmonic and rhythmic paintings of such artists as Kandinsky, Klee, Severini, Picasso, or O'Keeffe, or in Fauvist or so-called New Wave painting.

Music is used in film for effect, to alert the viewer to an action that is about to occur, to accompany and enhance a particular mood, or to complete a transition between scenes. In the footage of bands in performance music dominates, and images serve as illustrations. The

combination of images and music as equals has explosive possibilities, and it is only in video that this cooperation is beginning. As a creative tool, the video screen becomes a defined space (not unlike a canvas or piece of drawing paper) within which surface depth, color, structure, and motion can interact with timbre, rhythm, and lyric content. The result can be a visually musical statement, an active narrative illustrative of both lyric content and musical structure, or a commentary on the musical and verbal messages that are consumed and created by the mass media. These mass media communications are most accessible to video-makers through tele-

vision. Television is the most potent producer of American images and it has formulated a new language with which to deliver its message. This language is oral, visual, episodic, dramatic, and concrete. It is delivered through manipulation of a very sophisticated technology, more sophisticated than that previously available to artists. For these reasons, it is the artist's prime source for use or quotation, both for its image content and for its message delivery. This quotation allows access to techniques and effects that can enhance artists' images, while allowing an artist to make statements about mass media realities.

The artists who are making video-music pieces are commenting on media and mass culture. They are making alternative statements that question accepted standards and suggest new ways of combining music and image--ways that are not designed to sell products or provide transitions between scenes and commercials. They are creating work in which both the musical and visual content enhance and expand upon one another. They produce narratives to illustrate songs, quote media to gain access to broadcast technology and political events, and collaborate with musicians in order to add musical elements to both image choice and editing techniques.

Judy Rifka's Slap Pals (1980) is a collection of short songs in which images from her paintings appear to dance within a richly textured surface. Words appear as road signs and titles, both explaining and emphasizing the vitality of the movement. Bruce Tovsky, the composer of the music for Slap Pals and the creator of Doppelganger (1982) uses similar images, one of which looks as if it stepped out of a Jonathan Borofsky painting, and into Tovsky's Matisse inspired painting on video tape.

While Tovsky and Rifka are figurative video "painters," Laurie Spiegel and Reynold Weidenaar create musical abstractions by feeding musical impulses into a computer. In Voyages (1979), Spiegel's manipulations of harmony and color create a screen crawling with tubes of emerging pastels that suddenly turn into brilliant colors. In Pathways III: Visual Music Variations (1980), Weidenaar creates waves of color with impulses from the taps of tap dancers and his own electronic compositions. Both of these composers see their visuals as an extension of and a meditative reflection upon their music.

To the accompaniment of music by Earl Howard, Rii Kanzaki combines black and white footage of birds in flight with delicate color washes. Birds (1981) is ambient, hypnotic and

mesmerizing. James Byrne's Of Water, Of Place (1980) is also an ambient statement, his about water. Images of water are shot from different angles and attached to sounds of running, moving and rushing water.

Sara Hornbacher's I/O Disorders Meaning, O/Tapis Roulant, I Cameo-Flauge (1982) induces a video stare, neither restful or hypnotic, that jumps out of the screen, overcomes the viewer and covers the entire viewing room with a perpetual flicker. By cutting highly contrasting images quickly from frame to frame, Hornbacher creates a whirlpool in which images both emerge and are submerged, while droning electronic tones pulsate in the background. One of the emergent cuts is the face of Martin Luther King, Jr. Caught and vibrating in this perpetual



I/O Disorders Meaning, O/Tapis Roulant, I Cameo-Flauge (1982) by Sara Hornbacher.

flicker, King's image becomes a timeless vision of civil rights battles, front page newspaper stories, his "I Have a Dream" speech, all brought to the forefront of consciousness.

"The political climate, I do not like it..." sings a voice in Jo Ann Gillerman's Five Responses to the Political Climate (1981). Processed and colorized footage from television news coverage of the shooting of President Reagan is superimposed over corporate trademarks and pentagons. In What Are You Scared Of? (1981), her collaboration with James Gillerman and Jim Whiteaker (together they comprise Viper Optics), fear has become an abstraction, an undefinable but pervasive element of contemporary life.

Dara Birnbaum's Kojak/Wang (1979) suggests a more graphic representation of fear. She has taken a short segment of a gun battle from the police series "Kojak," intercut it with a Wang computer commercial, and repeated the two segments in rapid succession. She cuts the "Kojak" footage just at the point when one of the men who has been shot yells, creating the word "wang," a boomerang effect of image and language. By quoting and editing in this precise way, and attaching these images to the driving guitar music of composer Rhys Chatham, Birnbaum poses a question about the acceptance of television violence. She also incorporates television's sophisticated technologies into her work. "Why not take it right off the air? Why not deal head-on with the institution--not the institution of art, but the institution of TV itself? When TV is presenting multiple time multiple space, that's for sure what you want to comment on. All of a sudden an image shoots by, flips over in space, zooms out again. Turn on channel 7 sports...absolutely amazing..."

All of a sudden you're in real time. The next second you're in slow-mo." (Dara Birnbaum, ZG Magazine, Number 1, 1981) In General Hospital (1979), Birnbaum joins footage of two women speed skaters with a couple having a dialogue from the daytime soap opera, "General Hospital." The skaters are accompanied by a Donna Summer disco song, the couple by their own halted speech. Together they become a visual, verbal, and musical statement about interpersonal communication, physical motion, and distance.

Kirk Heflin also uses pre-existing footage, however his choices are taken from classic black and white movies. Beat Street (1981) is accompanied by the group "IMA," and is a visual collage of fast-cut transitions between machinery, factories, and workers in a virtual ballet of motion and machinery.

Shalom Gorewitz shoots images with Super 8mm film and then transfers the film to video. His intention is that these visual sequences be silent, or accompanied by soundtracks that fit the mood of the viewing place. Despite the fact that the music is only suggested, Gorewitz's image processing techniques, colorizing and transformations of images, and his musical editing cause the work to echo the sentiments of the music.

Urban Video's Berlin (1981) is a portrait that depends upon selected music by Tuxedo Moon for its haunting presence. The visuals are of a

country separated by a wall, a woman walking a baby beside a barbed wire barrier, being watched from a guard tower. Tunnels suddenly change colors, dissolve, and are recomposed, in memory. Advanced T.V.'s Surfclubbing (1981) is an entertaining counterpoint to Berlin. Visions of haze-colored waves and brightly colorized bodies play on an endless beach, a homage to the glories of an endless summer.

Also covered in sand, this time in a desert, are The Bongos (1981), a band from Hoboken, New Jersey. Ed Steinberg uses the desert set-up to remove the band from a standard performance situation. Merrill Aldighieri and Joe Tripician place the Shox Lumania band in the dressing room at the Chase Park Nightclub in Pointy Head Gear (1982). A study in documentation and fantasy, the footage of the band making-up and dressing is submitted to quick cuts and rapid edits. The result is an upbeat, New Wave treatment of a musical portrait.

While Pointy Head Gear is a collaboration between artists and musicians that has an almost frantic intensity, Eugenia Balcells' Indian Circle (1981) is a smooth and peaceful combination of Balcells' camera and Peter Van Riper's performance in a collaborative improvisation. The camera studies the floor, ceiling, window sill, door and Van Riper as he creates the soundtrack on an unusual collection of wind and percussive instruments.

This kind of unedited collaboration between artist and musician is done in performance by the two video bands in this exhibition. Both the Lubies and Central Control create the video image and sound at the same time, and are able to do this before a live audience. In Let It Snow (1981), Henry Linhart's form is outlined on a wall while Josh Fried is heard singing "let it snow." Every time Linhart hits the wall the picture shatters, then dissolves. Central Control's Out of Dream (1981) is a work in three movements that tells a story of love, surrender, liberation, and defeat in a richly saturated screen of brilliant colors. This tape is the first collaboration between group members Jim Serpent, James Seven, and Jan Hall and is unedited record of a complete production with all effects, staging, and processing done live.

Another kind of collaboration, that is more similar to work of the Balcells and Van Riper than to that of the video bands, is Ear to the Ground (1982). Kit Fitzgerald and John Sanborn take their cameras and follow David Van Tieghem as he drums on phone booths, sidewalks, trash

cans, and other percussive surfaces that are in his path in Lower Manhattan. With his unique editing ability, Sanborn turns this document of a performance into a work that also stands alone as a video tape, and as a musical score. "We don't want to make pictures that just sit on top of a soundtrack, nor does he (the composer) want to make a soundtrack that just sits on top of pictures...things that we're trying to do have a lot of integration involved with the actor's dialogue being picked up and integrated into the schema of the musical setting." (John Sanborn, ZG Magazine, Number 3, 1981) This integration of dialogue, image, and music creates what Sanborn describes as "visual humming."

A picture that hums, shouts, screams, doubles back and howls with delighted and complicated joy is Robert Ashley's made for television opera, *Music Word Fire and I Would Do It Again, Coo-Coo, "The Lessons"* (1981) from *Perfect Lives* (Private Parts). This work was commissioned by the Kitchen for television broadcast and is a collaboration between Ashley, Sanborn and Fitzgerald, Peter Gordon, Blue Gene Tyranny, David Van Tieghem and Jill Kroesen. It is probably the most important work to enter the realm of video-music since the medium's inception. It is intended as a new form of television musical theater, and was developed as a virtuoso performance for musicians and television artists in which the principles of musical improvisation are applied to the ordering of television images. Amid the numerous plots woven into the opera's complex visual and narrative structure appear an array of images of Kroesen and Van Tieghem shot on location in the Midwest. Within these images, and within the structuring of these images on a myriad of split screen assemblages lie Ashley's explorations of image/music content.

These explorations constitute the essence of powerful and intuitively effective video-music works. They are the creative foundation of pictures that hum, ambient portraits that induce video stares, illustrative narratives that leave visual/musical phrases running through the memory for weeks, quotations that make us question our institutions. The artists in *Video-Music: New Correlations* are manipulating the elements of art and music in order to create a medium in which these separate disciplines interact and become one. It is within this explosive union that the creative possibilities are just beginning to be explored.

-----Sarah Taylor States



Skank (1981) by the Lubies.

Scanning: Video and Music

Artists have long been fascinated by the challenge of relating abstract and literal images to music, and though there are important precedents in painting, live performance, and film, video (itself a fairly new art medium) has just recently shown its wide integrative possibilities. Technically, video has always been suited for this integration, but the synesthetic impulse in recent video work results from the increased availability of sophisticated equipment at experimental video centers, the installation of video systems in rock clubs, and the recently opened access to a larger audience through broadcast and especially cablecast television.

Long before video tapes even existed, artists were exploring the possible relationships between music and image. Kandinsky, and, later, the Synchronist painter Stanton Macdonald-Wright, both spoke of their work in musical terms. On the opera stage, Wagner created spectacles of song, dance, costumes and exotic sets. The composer Scriabin, working in Russia used dazzling light displays to accompany his musical compositions. In more recent times, laser projections have been used to visually enliven concerts.

Experimental filmmakers have long felt that film lent itself well to exploring the qualities of music, especially rhythm. Though it shares the temporal element of live performance, film

offers a greater capacity for control through editing and the manipulation of single frame units. The "absolute filmmakers" early in this century, such as Viking Eggling, Hans Richter, James Whitney Sr., and Oskar Fischinger (whose work inspired Walt Disney's *Fantasia*) made silent, and usually abstract, animated films that created visually rhythmic patterns on the screen.

Film suited the more symphonic music of earlier times. But for the technology-based work of advanced, as well as popular composers since World War II, video has become the effective medium for the collaboration of the contemporary musical and visual imaginations--aided in no small part by recent technological developments such as solid state transistors and microchips.

Musicians were the first in the arts to take advantage of these developments, with composers such as Harry Partch and Edgar Varese using magnetically recorded sounds in their work. Others, such as Milton Babbitt, and Karlheinz Stockhausen used electronic synthesizers to produce new sounds for their compositions. Synthesizers are grouped components (including waveform generators, oscillators, filters, and envelope generators) which create and manipulate electronic signals as they pass through the various parts of the system. Tape recorders can take the electronic signals from a synthesizer or microphone and translate them onto magnetic tape. When played back, the magnetic information is decoded and amplified, and made audible by the vibration of membranes in speakers, vibrations which, in turn, create sound waves.

Video uses a similar process. Images captured by a video camera and transformed by a photosensitive scanning device are rendered into electronic signals which can be amplified in a video monitor instantly, recorded onto tape, or manipulated in a variety of ways by synthesizing or processing equipment. If the artist chooses, he or she can mix material from several cameras, or create images without a camera.

Until the early 1960's when Sony marketed the Portapak--a video system using half-inch black and white tape, a light camera and small recorder--video was unavailable to individuals, and limited solely to network television use. Throughout the 1960's and 1970's, artists experimented with the Portapak and the equipment which followed it in a variety of ways. It was a period when artists were concerned with exploring the basic formal properties that each

medium of art making possessed. The qualities of video which were of special concern to artists were its immediate delivery of image, its portability, and cheap, reusable tape. Another facet which artists explored was video's relation to broadcast television, that medium's traditions, and its formal qualities. In his essay "Sacrament and Television," of 1975, Jack Burnham observed: "The taboos of network television.... are frequently broken by Television Art which uses deliberate repetition, private candor (on occasion), sexual explicitness, and downright monotony. Its little-boy misbehavior militates against the split-second solemnity of Big Brother, the networks."

Nam June Paik was one of the first artists to get involved with video; the Korean-born composer had worked with electronic components and took delight in fiddling with the contents of tape recorders and old televisions to produce dazzling consequences. In 1968, with the assistance of the electronics engineer Shuya Abe, Paik brought together his experiments and invented the first video synthesizer at WGBH, Boston's public broadcasting station. Paik published the wiring diagrams in an uncopyrighted form so that others could build similar units or alter the system to suit their needs, and so that no corporation could monopolize his work. Several television stations, private centers, and educational institutions, starting with a Paik/Abe synthesizer, have since built other equipment modified from his plans and provided facilities for advanced experimental video work to artists at a reasonable cost.



Measures of Volatility/ The Beta Factor (1979) by Shalom Gorewitz.

Despite the importance of such facilities as the Experimental Television Center in Owego, New York, the TV Lab at WNET/Channel 13, and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago for fostering highly technological work of excellent quality, most video done today is still the work of individuals or small teams, finished in basic editing studios. Video production is expensive, even for the simplest of tapes—standard equipment, tape, and editing (not to mention the special processes available) add up to a high price for an individual.

Partly because of this financial problem, one type of facility newly available for video production and exhibition, the rock music club, is beginning to make an effect on the work being done with music. Clubs across the country are installing video systems which, with a few additional components and a little extra wiring, can become editing as well as exhibition centers. Video first appeared in a New York club in the fall of 1979, and the idea has been spreading across the country ever since. Philosophies of programming in these clubs vary greatly. One New York club periodically devotes a night to video done by local artists, another occasionally focuses on concert tapes of popular groups such as the Rolling Stones. Some show only the promotional tapes distributed by record companies, while others mix clips from political speeches, old movies, TV shows, and obscure educational materials. The video shown in clubs, which serves as background entertainment to the regular activities of the club, is generally fast-paced, visually engaging, and coupled with popular music, either from a soundtrack or added by the video-jockey, ("VJ"). Most VJs have taken advantage of their access to the facilities in the clubs to produce their own tapes for screening in clubs and elsewhere. Structurally, these tapes are based on quick editing between several sources—as the basic tool in a club's video programming room is the two machine editor, which can switch between two tapes or sources of image. The content of these tapes usually deals with rock music (as a soundtrack) or its culture.

Good rock music performances can be as visually dramatic as they are aurally exciting, and good rock video can be even better. In the history of broadcasting, rock performances on television (such as the Beatles on The Ed Sullivan Show) have always been a special event. John Sanborn, who has recently formed a record/video company with composer Peter Gordon, points to the importance of such shows as Shindig or Hullabaloo in the

development of music on video. These 1960's television shows broke the ground for the independent, as well as record company-produced "promo-tapes," which first reached advanced form in Great Britain because of that country's record-marketing structure: television shows which feature these tapes are like AM radio here, providing primary mass exposure for recently released records. Promo tapes are shown here on late-night television shows for a teenage audience, in clubs, and on cable TV features such as Warner-Amex Corporation's "MTV," a 24-hour rock video channel which is programmed like an album oriented radio station.

The range of these tapes, all made to promote a group and sell their records, varies greatly from poorly edited scenes of bands singing to their records to complexly structured narratives which explore different levels of the song. Record companies are usually quite conservative about the form of these tapes, and usually stick with the safer tapes, those based on the actual performance of a song. Some of the best promo tapes are made by independent producers with a background in experimental film or video, since they have a vocabulary with which to say something different about the music through significant imagery. The demand for rock video is so great that a distribution service has been formed to circulate these tapes to clubs, colleges, and record stores.

But clubs, colleges, and record stores are not the only outlets for video. During the past few years there has been a growing interest on the part of artists to produce work specifically for television, using it as a creative medium because of its properties and its influential position in society today.

Neither network nor publicly funded broadcast television has been especially hospitable to artists' work. The inherent conservatism of the former is almost matched by the latter's rigid definition of "cultural programming." Artists have therefore turned to cable television. Transmitting signals through coaxial cables similar to the process used in telephone transmission, cable television requires individual tie-ins for each building, but offers better reception, stereo sound capability, and many more channels than standard broadcast television, wholly transmitted via airwaves. With more channels comes a wider range of programming, and as each community has the right to guide the development of cable television franchising in its area, each is able to reserve several channels for "public access," for use by individuals or groups which have program material.

Artists were quick to become involved with public access cablecast. "Metropolis Video" was an early group that showed music on television; on weekends the members would borrow equipment and shoot the local punk groups performing at clubs like CBGBs on the Bowery. Soho TV, an artist-oriented group, was organized in 1975 and soon after went on the cables with Soho TV Presents. They now focus their efforts on presenting artists who work with television as an art medium, rather than on those who are concerned solely with producing video art. Collaborative Projects Inc., a third group, sponsors Potato Wolf, a series with different artists in charge of programming each week. There are individual artists who do work for television, though few have the resources or energy to last longer than one season. Noted avant-garde composer Robert Ashley, who is seeking network production for his opera for television, Perfect Lives (Private Parts) is typical of this new breed of artist when he comments: "I want to address my work in music toward the medium of television."

A secondary outlet for artists work in video is the sale of video cassettes or videodiscs. The home video market is one that is growing, despite the failure of manufacturers to adopt standard hardware. Those companies that provide programs, or "software," are presently expanding their inventories of music tapes with stage musicals, rock concerts, and new "video albums," the latter mostly extended promos done by the groups more interested in video, such as Blondie or Devo. Several computer video artists have been commissioned by software companies to do work for mass marketing. Though there is some interest on the part of these companies in artists' work, it is limited. The video distribution companies which sell copies of tapes by artists they represent are at present respectfully small commercial undertakings.

Artists have always been interested in the integration of music with images; video is now developed to the point where it can use its properties to explore relationships previously unavailable with other media. Whether on tape or TV, artists working with video are wholly dependent on the production and distribution technology available to them. Any change, such as the development of a new component or an important legal decision concerning telecommunications, could completely redirect the interests of artists working with video.

--Dana Friis-Hansen



Indian Circle (1981) by Eugenia Balcells.

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Viewing Schedule

MONDAYS, WEDNESDAYS, AND FRIDAYS

11:30 - 12:30

Samurai Toys (1982) 2:43 by Advanced T.V.

Polycopier (1981) 13:30 by Sara Hornbacher.

I Will Follow (1981) 3:20 by Kirk v. Heflin.

Five Responses to the Political Climate,
November 1980 (1981) 13:34 by Jo Ann
Gillerman.

Twilight Flight (1981) 7:29 by Reynold Weidenaar.

Berlin 1980 (1981) 5:27 by Robin Schanzenbach.

GroupMcGroup (1981) 3:46 by Bruce Tovsky
and Richard McGuire.

12:30 - 1:30

I/O Disorders Meaning, O/Tapis Roulant,

I Cameo Flaue (1982) 15:00
by Sara Hornbacher.

Kiss the Girls (1979) 6:46 by Dara Birnbaum.

Measures of Volatility/Beta Factor (1979) 5:00
by Shalom Gorewitz.

Let It Snow (1981) 4:56 by the Lubies.

Surfclubbing (1981) 3:30 by Advanced T.V.

Slap Pals (1981) 24:20 by Judy Rifka.

1:30 - 2:30

Music Word Fire and I Would Do It Again

(COO-COO):The Lessons From Perfect Lives
(Private Parts), (1981) by Robert Ashley.

Pointy Head Gear (1982) 2:52 by Merrill
Aldighieri and Joe Tripician.

Whipped (1981) 6:09 by the Lubies.

Bush Tetras (1980) 4:30 by Ed Steinberg.

General Hospital (1979) 5:20 by Dara Birnbaum.

What Are You Scared Of ? (1981) 4:00
by Viper Optics.

TUESDAYS AND THURSDAYS

11:30 - 12:30

Birds (1981) 9:00 by Rii Kanzaki.

Voyages (1979) 29:00 by Laurie Spiegel.

Doppelganger (1982) 5:15 by Bruce Tovsky.

Pathways III: Visual-Music Variations (1980)
9:05 by Reynold Weidenaar.

Static (1981) 2:30 by Kit Fitzgerald
and John Sanborn.

It's Going to Be a Great Day (1981)
2:43 by the Lubies.

12:30 - 1:30

The Bongos: "Mambo Sun" (1981) 8:30
by Ed Steinberg.

Of Water, Of Place (1980) 8:10 by James Byrne.

The Colors (1980) 3:30 by Ed Steinberg.

Episode (1981) 3:13 by Kit Fitzgerald
and John Sanborn.

Black and White (1981) 1:30 by Kit Fitzgerald
and John Sanborn.

Kojak/Wang (1980) 3:00 by Dara Birnbaum.

Beat Street (1981) 5:00 By Kirk v. Heflin.

Skank (1981) 5:00 by the Lubies.

Girl Porn: Boys Backs (1981) 2:40

by Advanced T.V. and Urban Video.

Lady E (1981) 4:00 by Viper Optics.

Strange Party: Sleepwalking Through Life (1981)
2:43 by Robin Schanzenbach.

1:30 - 2:30

Ear to the Ground (1982) 4:05 by Kit Fitzgerald
and John Sanborn.

Indian Circle (1981) 29:00 by Eugenia Balcells.

Chicago Sunset (1979) 3:37 by Shalom Gorewitz.

Out of Dream (1981) 13:53 by Central Control.